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EXCOMMUNICATION

OF THE

BISHOP OF NATAL.

The Bishop of Capetown's Letter to the Clergy and Laity.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

The time has arrived when it becomes my duty, in accordance with the decision of the Bishops of this Province in Synod assembled, to separate Dr. Colenso, by solemn sentence, from the Communion of the Church. In taking this step, I feel that I ought to set before you the reasons which have constrained us to adopt this painful course; and the duties which it imposes upon us all.

The heresies into which Dr. Colenso has fallen are no light or common errors. They touch the very life and being of the Christian Church—overthrow the faith of Christendom. It is not merely the distinctive teaching of the Church of England that he has impugned. He has assailed those fundamental truths of our common Christianity, which are equally cherished by the Churches of the east and the west, and by every sect and denomination of Protestant Christians. It is with Christianity itself, as a Revelation from God, that he is at war.

I have gone so fully into this subject, both in my judg-

ment, and in the charge which I delivered at Natal, that I do not feel it necessary to enter at length upon it again. I will simply, therefore, recall to your minds here, what I have already shewn, that the system which he would substitute for that which has been held by the whole Christian Church, since the first coming of our Lord, is —

(I.)—That the Bible is not, as a whole, the Word of God (i.); That several of its Books which the Church has ever regarded as portions of that Word, contain myths, legends, fables, mis-statements, falsehoods, forgeries, (ii.); That no reliance can be placed upon such portions as he would leave to us (iii.); That they are not an absolute guide to us even in matters of “faith and morals” (iv.); That “every living man” is to judge for himself, by “the voice which he hears within,” which is “the voice of his Lord”—“the light of the Divine Lord”—whether any or what portion of the Scriptures are the Word of God—thereby setting his own spiritual perceptions above the Revelation of “God’s Word written,” that “by that light, the words recorded to have been uttered by our Lord Himself must all be tried.” (v.)

(II.)—That “God manifest in the flesh” the Everlasting Son of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, who came down from Heaven, and

(i) Pentateuch : Part 2—pp. 380, 381, 382, 383. Part 3—pref. p. xxviii.

(ii.) Pentateuch: Part 1—pref. pp. xix, xx. ; pp. 8, 9, 10, 11, 13. Part 2—pref. p. viii. ; pp. 184, 185, 208, 262, 263, 330, 332, 339, 343, 348, 349, 351, 352, 368, 371. Part 3—pp. 427, 428, 429, 433.

(iii.) Pentateuch : Part 4—pp. 623, 624, 625. Part 2—pp. 237, 351. Part 4—p. 85.

(iv.) Pentateuch: Part 3—pp. 625, 626, 628. Part 4—p. 263.

(v.) Pentateuch: Part 3—pp. 628, 629. Part 4—p. 297. Part 1—p. 152. Rom, 189.

took our nature into the Godhead, was ignorant, and in error. (vi.)

(III.)—That all that is needed to make the Jew—who still believes our Lord to be a deceiver and an impostor—a herald of salvation with the ministers of Christ, is that he should “shake off the superstitious belief of ages,” and “give up the story of the Pentateuch”—*i. e.*, that the pure Deism which he would then hold and teach would be the only truth needed to be taught for men's salvation. (vii.)

(IV.)—That the formularies of the Church—including, apparently, the creeds of Christendom—which embody, affirm, define the faith of Christ, as held and taught by the “Church from the beginning, which she requires to be subscribed by her Clergy, and which are a chief security to the Laity that the true faith of Christ shall be ever taught in our Churches, are “antiquated,” “worn out,” “formulae of bygone days,” which it would be well for us to set aside. (viii.)

(V.)—That the language “attributed to our Lord Himself” in the New Testament need not be received by us, because He was apparently much influenced by a spurious Apocryphal work, especially on such subjects as “the Judgment of the Last Day.” (ix.)

(VI.)—That the progress of scientific criticism may probably require us “to modify our present views of Christianity itself.” That the old traditionary system, that is, the Church's faith which has hitherto been received

(vi.) Pentateuch: Part 1—pref. pp. xxx, xxxi. Part 3—pp. 622, 623.

(vii.) Pentateuch: Part 2—p. 384.

(viii.) Pentateuch: Part 2—pref. pp. xxv, xxvi, xxvii, xxviii, xxx; note xxxi, xxxii, xxxv. Part 4—pref. pp. xiii, xxxiv, xxxv. Remarks p. 15.

(ix.) Pentateuch: Part 4—p. 314 and note, 317 notes, 319 notes, 320, 321 notes, 323, 325, 326, 327.

as Divine for well nigh two thousand years, is passing away to make room for a new faith—that, like the Jewish before it, it was “a schoolmaster to lead us” to some deeper, higher, truer religion, and that the time has arrived for its abandonment. “That we are passing through a transition state.” That the Christ of history who came into the world to die for our salvation, and rose and ascended into Heaven, there ever to appear in the presence of God for us, is in some sense to be no longer our Christ, but is to make way for “the Christ that is to be,”—*i.e.*, apparently, that we are to view Him and His work, and Christianity itself, in a wholly different light from that in which the Church has hitherto regarded Him, and the Revelation which He has given. (x.)

(VII.)—That it is at least doubtful whether we have descended from Adam and Eve; and highly probable “that we did not.” That man is not a fallen being, though he may have descended from the gorilla or the ape. That the “notion of an evil spirit” at war with the good God and His work—*i.e.*, belief in the devil—is mere superstition and fable—“the offspring of a Persian myth”—and that, consequently, our blessed Lord, who taught us to believe in and to dread the approach of the enemy of our souls, was either a deceiver, or was Himself deceived. (xi.)

Is it too much to say that what Dr. Colenso has taught is a new religion—a substitution of something else for the existing Christianity of the world? It is this; and yet, at the same time, merely a return to the Deism of the higher minds of the heathen world, before the coming of Christ.

It was for this teaching that, after having been summoned

(x.) Pentateuch: Part 2—pp. 355, 378. Letter to the Laity, p. 28.

(xi.) Lecture before Anthropological Society.

to resign his see by the whole Episcopate of England, as well as by the clergy of your diocese, he was deposed from his office by the united voice of all the Bishops of this Province, including the one who could not be present at the trial, but had the whole case forwarded to him. And it was for this teaching that it was declared by the Synod of the Province that he must be separated from the communion of the Church, if he should venture to assume government over the Church of God without being restored to his office by the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Metropolitan. He has done this, in spite of repeated warnings, entreaties and protests, and no option is left to me but to carry out the resolution of the Synod. The act is of so sad, and, so far as we are concerned, of so novel a character, that it is due to you that I should state to you in virtue of what authority, and in obedience to what obligations, it is done. Consider what the Church of Christ is. It is a "kingdom." Our Lord expressly called it such. And it is a spiritual kingdom, of which He is the Head and King. It is in the world, but not of it. "My kingdom is not of this world." He has Himself ordained laws for His kingdom, and has prescribed modes for admission into it, and exclusion from it. As He has appointed the Sacrament of Baptism to be the door of entrance into it, so has He ordained that for grave faults there shall be, by formal sentence exclusion from it. The power to exclude is to be within the Church itself. "If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican." (St. Matt. xvii., 17, 18.) It is to the officers whom He has commissioned and placed within His Church that He has intrusted the execution of its laws. They act under His authority and by His command. "As My Father

hath sent Me, even so send I you." (St. John xx. 21.) "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me." (St. Luke xxii. 29.) "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (St. Matt. xvii. 18.) "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (St. Matt. xxviii. 21.)

None have doubted that our Lord gave power to His Apostles to shut out from His Kingdom any who might fall away from Him, or that He pledged Himself to confirm their acts. But the Church never supposed that this office belonged only to the twelve. St. Paul, not himself one of their number, repeatedly exercised it. Through him, the Holy Ghost commanded Titus, Bishop of Crete, as well as the Church of Corinth, to discharge it. "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject." (Titus iii. 10.) "Put away from yourselves that wicked person." (I Cor. v. 13.) In accordance with the language of Scripture, the Church has ever held that its Divine Head has lodged this power in the hands of Bishops, to be used by them only as a last resource, when warnings, admonitions and entreaties have all failed, and the sinner persists in his sin. Bishops themselves are no more exempt from the censures of the Church than the humblest individual within it. From the first its discipline has been applied to them in accordance with the canons which regulate it. It has ever rested with the Bishops of a Province to put in force the discipline of the Church with regard to any other brother Bishop who might either have been betrayed into sin, or have fallen from the faith; and no power but that of a higher Synod could, or can, annul their sentence.

A case, which can scarcely be paralleled in the history of

the Church, has now unhappily occurred amongst us. A brother, once beloved, has fallen openly away from Christ, and has published works attacking, as we have seen, the fundamental truths of the Christian faith, which he came out to this land to teach and uphold. I have myself, from the first, entreated him to withhold or withdraw these books, and, when entreaties failed, I warned him what the results must be; he persisted, and the Church, in her highest Court of Convocation at home, condemned his works, and more than forty Bishops urged him to resign his see, as the clergy who were under him also did. When no heed was given to warnings or entreaties, he was presented to me, as Metropolitan of this province, for trial. To that trial every Bishop within reach was summoned to assist in hearing the case. His writings were condemned and he was called upon to retract. He refused, and was deprived. The sentence was not final, he might have appealed to the Patriarch of our Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury; but he declined; he preferred to appeal to the civil power. He asked of it whether the jurisdiction which the Crown sought to give to the Metropolitan, under the exercise of which he had been deprived of a Patent office, had been constitutionally given. That power replied through its highest court of law, that the Crown had no power to confer jurisdiction, or coercive legal authority, either upon the Metropolitan or the Suffragans; that the Letters Patent, affecting to confer this power, were to this extent at least, illegal instruments; that Dr. Colenso is still in legal possession of his title through his Patent, which the Metropolitan had no legal power to cancel; and, possibly, though this is undecided, of his income; that he is a Bishop, however, without a diocese or jurisdiction, there being, in

law, no diocese of Natal; that the Church in Natal is a Church without laws—a mere voluntary association; that the clergy and laity may frame their own laws, or accept the Church's laws—may, consequently, elect their own Bishops—and are, therefore, not bound to accept Dr. Colenso as their Bishop unless they so will.

This decision is, of course, good in law. Whatever legal titles or powers it gives to Dr. Colenso will not be disputed. Legal coercive jurisdiction there is none, and the attempt to give it will never again be repeated. No more Letters Patent are to be issued, that the Churches may see that they are entirely free to act for themselves.

It is right, however, that I should say that no coercive jurisdiction was ever claimed by me. My judgment neither affected to touch the title conferred upon Dr. Colenso by the Crown, nor the salary allowed him by the Bishops of the Church of England. It affected only his spiritual office as a pastor of souls. It is because he now sets aside and despises the spiritual sentence, and openly affirms that he will preach and teach amongst us the heresies for which he has been condemned, and claims obedience and submission to his authority, on the part of the clergy and the whole flock, which the judgment upon which he relies gives him no right to demand, and no power to enforce, that we, after repeated admonitions, and earnest entreaties, are driven to take the last step that the Church enjoins us to do in such cases.

Upon spiritual sentences, or their effects, the judgment does not touch. Incidentally, however, it recognizes the spiritual authority of the Metropolitan, given by Christ through His Church. To have refused to acknowledge this, would have been to persecute—to deny to the Church

—liberties which she enjoyed even under heathen emperors. The spiritual sentence then of the Church remains just where it did. All that has been decided is a point of law. With the spiritual powers, rights, office of the different orders in the Church, the law has no concern, and does not claim to interfere.

Though I have ever respected, as I was bound to do, the Queen's Letter Patent, framed and prepared by the highest law officers of the Crown and bearing the signature of my Sovereign, and in all my proceedings have endeavoured to act in strict accordance with their provisions, I have never believed, nor acted as if I believed, that my authority was derived from them. I have ever held that my commission was given to me from Christ through His Church.* The Church, in her Lord's name, entrusted me with spiritual power. The Crown sought, but it seems, sought in vain, to clothe that power with the authority of law. In its attempts to do so, it has hampered and weakened it. Under these circumstances, the only question really is this: "Is the right to deprive a Suffragan of his power to minister in Christ's name, and with His authority, lodged, by the laws and canons of the Church, in the Metropolitan and Bishops of a region called a Province, because of the peculiar relations in which its Bishops stand to each other; and has that right been exercised with a due regard to justice in the present case?"

There can be no doubt, that by the canons of the Church from the earliest ages—canons accepted by the Church of England, acknowledged and acted upon in our courts at home—the power to deprive a Bishop of his spiritual func-

* Judgment, pp. 4, 5. Natal Charge, p. 5.

tions rests with the Metropolitan and Bishops of a Province, and that it has, on the rare occasions when circumstances have called for it, been exercised by them in the Church of England. In this case the Bishops of the Province were unanimous in their judgment,—that their brother had departed widely from the faith of Christ, and ought to be deprived of his spiritual functions; and their conclusions have had the hearty approbation of the Church at home, and, I may now add, of the Churches with which we are in communion throughout the world. His commission therefore, to minister to your souls, and to govern the flock of Christ, given by the Great Head, through his Church, has been withdrawn; and it is impossible that it should be restored, unless, by the grace of God, he be led to see the depth of that error into which he has fallen, and turn and repent.

But is he bound, it may be asked, to recognise and obey this spiritual act of the Church? I cannot myself see how any can doubt it. The moral obligation to yield obedience to an authority which one has sworn to obey, is not effaced by any inability to enforce that obedience by law. Dr. Colenso took his oath of canonical obedience, both at his consecration, when the Metropolitan, having no Letters Patent, laid hands upon him, and joined in giving him his commission; and again, after the issue of the Letters Patent. Be it, that at the time he thought there was legal power to enforce the spiritual authority which he recognised, does the obligation to obey that authority cease when it is discovered that it cannot be enforced by human law?

Dr. Colenso thinks so, and in defiance of it, now proceeds to harass the Church, and disturb its peace, not only

by maintaining still his grievous heresies, but adding to them, and demanding submission on the part of the clergy, and the right to proclaim his heresies within their churches.

It is this aggression on his part—this attitude which he has assumed towards them—claiming, as he does, the right to eject them from their Churches, if they refuse obedience to his authority, that compels us, by a further act, to separate him from the communion of the Church, and this we do, not in virtue of any jurisdiction derived from the Crown, but by the authority of our Lord, conveyed to us through His Church—assented to and accepted by him over whom it is now exercised—regulated and governed by the express injunctions of Christ.

Our act is purely of a spiritual character. It is not intended to affect any civil rights, or to carry with it any temporal consequences.

Every effort has been made, which could be, consistently with the rights, privileges, and duties of this Church, to escape the necessity of taking this sad and most painful step; and to induce him to submit the question of the soundness of his teaching to the decision of the Bishops of the United Church of England and Ireland, or of the Churches in communion with ourselves throughout the world. I have myself offered to refer my own judgment and sentence for revision by either of these tribunals. My offers have been rejected, and no option appears to be left to me. I am bound to carry out the decision of the Provincial Synod, arrived at after special prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is no light issue, my Brethren, which is at stake. The question which Dr. Colenso has raised, touches the honour

of Christ, and the truth which he has revealed. It affects also not only the well being of the Church of Natal, but its very being. It affects your own highest interests, and those of your children's children for generations yet to come.

How should we be discharging our duty to the Great Head of the Church, if we acknowledged, as a father in Christ, and as a ruler in His kingdom, one who writes and teaches as Dr. Colenso has done, respecting Him and the Bible, and the creeds of the Church. "The faith once for all delivered to the Saints" has been challenged, set aside, rejected. We must affirm, maintain, bear witness to it, at all costs and hazards. We could not be said to bear witness to it if we allowed one who has abandoned it to continue as a recognised teacher amongst us. We should be siding with him against our Lord, and against His Truth. Allegiance to Christ demands that we should withdraw from all spiritual intercourse with this false teacher, and thereby separate him from the communion of the Church.

And does not duty to yourselves, my Brethren, equally demand this of us? Your clergy and certain representatives of your laity have publicly affirmed that they can never again recognize him as their Bishop. The clergy have declared that, even though returning with the authority of the civil power, "he must still be regarded as lying under a righteous sentence of condemnation, and that they dare not acknowledge him as having authority in spiritual matters." Both clergy and laity, meeting in conference, "declared their fixed resolve that they will no longer acknowledge him as their Bishop."

The consequences of acknowledging him as still in communion with the Church, would be—First, that he and all

whom he might ordain and set over, whether the missions, or the English congregations of the diocese, would be ministers of the Church, teaching in her name, and with her authority, the very heresies which she has, both here and in England, condemned by her constitutional organs as destructive of the faith and ruinous to the souls of men. She would be responsible for this—would be implicated in the guilt of his teaching—provoke the threatened chastisement—Rev. ii. 14-20—go far to unchurch herself. Next, that the poor man, or the more uninstructed in the Christian faith, knowing little of religious truth, would be misled to his soul's loss; while the more instructed and religiously disposed would abandon his Church for some other religious body where, at least, essential truths, denied in his own communion, would be taught; and the Church having sunk into deadly heresy, would at length die out of the land. The presence of a body of orthodox clergy might for a time retard, but would not prevent this. They could hardly be expected long to endure the presence of an heretical Bishop, forcing himself into their churches, to teach doctrines to their people which they repudiate and abhor, but would fly the land as stricken; or they would gradually die out, their places being supplied by men ordained by the Bishop, and sharing his views; and the congregations, distracted by the opposite teaching of Bishop and Priest, would fall away and seek other spiritual homes for themselves.

Duty, therefore, to yourselves, Brethren, no less than to our Lord, has compelled the adoption of the course which the Bishops of this Province have pursued. We have felt called to take this step in defence of the faith, that we may maintain it in this Church, as we have received it, unim-

paired, and hand it on to those that shall come after in its integrity, and in its purity.

And we have felt called to protect you, and your children, and the converts of the heathen around you, as far as in us lies, from the preaching of "another Gospel, which is not another," bearing in our minds the Divine warning and injunction, "Though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. i. 7, 8.)

Most unwillingly—and God is our witness—with great sorrow of heart, all other means having failed, we have felt constrained, out of duty to our Lord, and to the flock that He has committed to our keeping, to fly to this last, and only remaining remedy, and separate, by open sentence, this false teacher from the communion of the faithful.

It is the method our Lord has bid us use, as we have seen, for the purging His Church from the leaven of false doctrine. It is the medicine too which He has prescribed for the recovery of the fallen; for this cutting off from the Church is not for the destruction of our Brother, but in the hope, and with the prayer, that, through the means of it, he may be led to repentance, and so to restoration, that "his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (I Cor. v. 5.)

I invite you, my Brethren, to join with me in daily intercession before the throne of God, that such may be the case with regard to him who was your Bishop—that his eyes may be opened—that he may be led back to the truth which he has forsaken, and recover his lost faith, and escape from the snare of the evil one.

But, meantime, and until he shall be restored to the peace and communion of the Church, I entreat you, for his

sake, and for your own, to act towards him as the Word of God enjoins—"If he will not hear the Church, let him be unto you as a heathen man and a publican." (St. Matt. xvii. 17.) "I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother," &c. (I Cor. v. 11.) "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." (Rom. xvi. 17.) "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." (2 Thess. iii. 14.) "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John, 10, 11.)

In conformity with these commands, the Church has ever shunned the company of those separated from her communion. The example of St. John, with regard to Cerinthus, has never ceased to be followed in such cases. How early Christians acted, we may gather from the Apostolical canons (x., xi.), which forbid any to communicate, even in a private house, with such. And from the language of one of our primitive African Bishops, whose praise is in all the Churches, "We ought," says the martyr Cyprian, "to withdraw from sinners, and even fly from them, lest if a man join himself to those who walk disorderly, and go in the paths of error and wickedness, he himself also be held in the guilt of the same crimes" (*De Unitate Ecclesie*); and again, in a case similar to ours (Epis. 68), his language to the faithful laity is, "They should not flatter themselves, as if they were free from partaking of sin, if they communicated with a sinful Bishop, and give their consent to his unlawful and unjust establishment of him in his bishopric,

since the divine judgment had threatened and said by the prophet Hosea, "Their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted."

Who shall say, my Brethren, what the issue may be, if, while sorrowing over him who, being sent to lead you to Christ and to the Truth, has sought to lead you away therefrom, and refraining from his company, you yet day by day pray earnestly for his restoration. Through your prayers, he may be given back to us, and we may yet rejoice over him as one who "was dead and is alive again, was lost and found." But whether this be the result or not, I must urge you, beloved Brethren, patiently to endure your trial. A storm is passing over the Church. But the Lord, though to some He may appear to slumber, is in the ship. Ere long, He will say to the winds and the waves, "Peace, be still." However threatening, then, and distressing present trials may be, be not, I pray you, "soon shaken in mind." Leave not your spiritual home, but gather round your Church for its protection and your safety. He who promised to His Church that He would be "with it always, even unto the end of the world," is, we doubt not, with this portion of it now, and will not cease to be, while it is true to Him. The very trials to which it is subjected give proof of this. Satan does not shoot out all his fiery darts against a dead and lifeless body. It is because His Church is a true witness for Christ in this land, that he thus rages against it. His malice is the token of our life. The Church's lot is to be ever militant upon earth, and this is our lot.

Amidst discouragements from quarters whence you might have looked for succour, and under the injury inflicted upon

you and your children by the oppressive judgments of the courts of the world, look up to your Lord for help, strength and guidance. Your cause is His cause. He sympathises with you; sorrows in your sorrows: shares your troubles: suffers in His members. Any wound inflicted on his body, the Church, pierces Him also. To those who persecute it, He says, "*Why persecutest thou Me?*" Lean then upon Him, in trust and confidence; He will not fail you. In His own good time He will vindicate His cause and His Church, and the faith which is in Him. In patient perseverance possess ye your souls. "Consider Him that endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your mind. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." (Heb. xii. 34.)

What in my weakness I can do, amidst present distresses for the strengthening of your faith and the supply of your spiritual need, I need scarcely say I gladly will do, as my office requires. If God spares me, I will again, when my presence is needed, visit the diocese as Metropolitan, and ordain, as I may be able, faithful men, and render such services as may be in my power, until this tyranny be overpast. Meantime, I shall not cease to pray for you, that, in the hour of peril to the faith, and to your own souls, you may witness a good confession—stand up for the faith and for your Lord,—and that, your warfare being ended, you may enter into the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

I am, dear Brethren in Christ,

Your faithful servant,

R. CAPETOWN.

To the Clergy and the Faithful in Christ Jesus,
in the Diocese of Natal.

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